

Washington, DC – Today, Reps. Thomas J. Rooney (R-Fla.) and Michael E. McMahon (D-NY) celebrated a major victory in their joint crusade to increase mental health funding for our soldiers and veterans. McMahon and Rooney announced \$500 million for Traumatic Brain Injury and Psychological health research, counseling and treatment programs included in the Defense Appropriations Act, which passed the House of Representatives today.

The freshmen lawmakers have been consistent collaborators in the fight to provide our service men and women with proper mental health care. In May, Reps. McMahon and Rooney sent a bipartisan letter, signed by almost fifty of their colleagues in the House, to Subcommittee on Defense Chairman John Murtha and Ranking Member Bill Young urging the Appropriations Defense Subcommittee to increase overall funding for mental health programs by \$300 million. Defense Secretary Robert Gates recommended this figure on April 6, 2009. The McMahon/Rooney letter received overwhelming support from the military and veteran communities. The \$500 million amount announced today for mental health funding is over \$125 million dollars more than called for by Reps. McMahon and Rooney as well as Sec. Gates.

“I applaud the Appropriations Defense Subcommittee for clearly making the mental health of our soldier and veterans a priority,” said Rep. Michael E. McMahon. “The fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan has taken a toll on our soldiers and their families, especially when many of our soldiers have been deployed three, four, or even five times. And I am constantly reminded that thousands of these brave men and women were sent to war after the tragic events of 9/11, which directly impacted my district. Providing proper mental health care to our soldiers and veterans is not something we can afford to compromise on and I thank my colleague Tom Rooney for joining me in the fight to make sure we never do.”

“The funding in this appropriations bill for mental health care and research is a step in the right direction to getting our war fighters the care they deserve,” said Rep. Tom Rooney. “Every month we hear different stories about incidents involving service members who have recently returned from battle, incidents that could be avoided with better screening. I look forward to continuing to work in a bipartisan manner to address the mental health problems facing so many of our soldiers as they return home from Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to make sure the Department of Defense has the necessary resources to address this growing problem.”

The McMahon/Rooney letter was sent at a time when 2008 reported the highest level of army suicide within the military since 1980. And with the onslaught of returning service members, 2009’s army suicide rate is projected to further surpass the 2008 level. Additionally, the

shootings in May at Camp Liberty of five of our nation's heroes indicated just how dire the need for mental health programs in the military had become. This increase in funding for mental health programs, along with a comprehensive post-deployment program to psychologically screen all of our service men and women, will go a long way to protecting our returning veterans. It will also allow for our newly returning service men and women to take proper care of their physical as well as psychological injuries through a program of mental health assessments and treatments.

Reps. McMahon and Rooney, along with Rep. Thomas Perriello (D-VA), also joined together in March to introduce H.R. 1308, the Veterans Mental Health Screening and Assessment Act of 2009, which will require mandatory, confidential mental health screenings for deploying service members.